

Sampson County Natural Area Inventory

PRIDGEN FLATS PINE FORESTS Significant Natural Heritage Area

Site significance: Regional

Size: 1,623 acres (1,203 acres within primary boundary, 420 acres within secondary boundary)

Quadrangles: Rowan, Tomahawk

Ownership: private

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: Pridgen Flats Pine Forests comprises what may be the largest remaining intact longleaf pine and pocosin ecosystem within Sampson County. The upland flats and Carolina bays support four natural community types, including the regionally uncommon Streamhead Pocosin. The site also supports populations of three Watch List plant species, plus southeastern fox squirrel (*Sciurus niger*) on the animal Watch List.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: This natural area lies at the southern end of Sampson County within the Black River Floodplain Macrosite. It is a major component of the corridor between South and Black rivers upstream of their confluence, with Pridgen Flats Pine Forests lying within a half mile of South River Floodplain Forest natural area to the west, and within three-fourths of a mile of Upper Black River Floodplain natural area to the east. The site is connected by way of these natural areas southward to other natural areas within the Black River Floodplain Macrosite. These landscape connections benefit the movement of several groups of animals. Within the natural area, the primary boundary includes habitat in good natural condition and/or with other exceptional biological values, while the secondary boundary includes areas of lesser natural value, but which buffer primary habitat and/or have good restoration potential.

SITE DESCRIPTION: Pridgen Flats Pine Forests natural area occupies a broad and mostly flat interstream terrace between the Black and South rivers. The terrace is characterized by low upland flats, streamhead drains, and Carolina bay basins. The upland flats comprise a majority of the site, and are primarily located in the central and western areas. The Carolina bays are located primarily along the eastern side, and streamheads exiting the bays flow southwestward across the upland flats to the South River floodplain. The upland flats support two longleaf pine communities, Wet Pine Flatwoods Wet Spodosol Variant and Xeric Sandhill Scrub Coastal Plain Variant, while the Carolina bays support Pond Pine Woodland. The Streamhead Pocosin community occurs within the streamhead drains.

Xeric Sandhill Scrub is found on the driest soils on the upland terrace. It is distinguished by an open to moderately dense canopy of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) over a moderate canopy of turkey oak (*Quercus laevis*). The shrub and ground layers are sparse to moderate, with dwarf deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*) an important component of the shrub layer. Wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) and reindeer lichen (*Cladonia* species) are prominent in the ground layer. In some areas the canopy is quite mature, with larger trees measuring 1.5 feet in diameter. The other longleaf pine community at this site, Wet Pine Flatwoods, occurs where the sandy soil is wet most of the year but tends to dry out later in the growing season. The moderate canopy is dominated by longleaf pine, but unlike the